

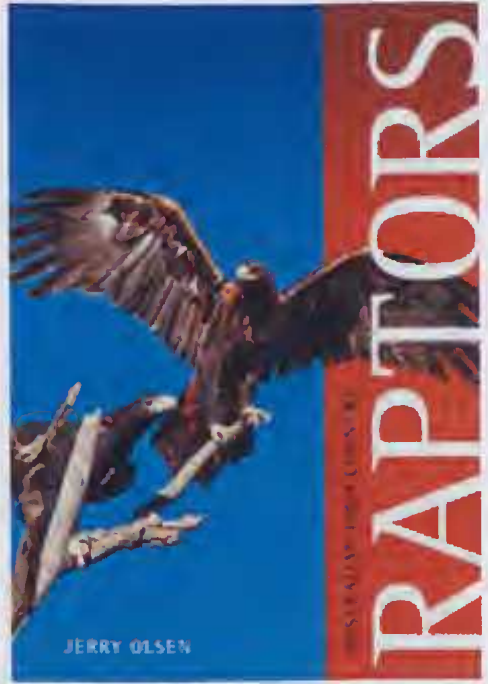
Australian High Country Raptors

by Jerry Olsen

Publisher: CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, Victoria, 2014. 336 pages, Paperback. ISBN 9780643109162. RRP \$69.95

This is a very personal account of Australian raptors (including a little on owls) and the author's experiences with them. It gives some illuminating comparisons with raptors elsewhere in the world and attempts to answer intriguing questions about them. The title may conjure images of remote rugged mountains, providing refuge for soaring eagles as they do elsewhere. Jerry moves quickly to dispel this view: in Australia we are lucky to have habitat for raptors over much of the country, and none of them really favour the high mountains. As with his previous book on high-country owls, and Harry Frith's classic *Birds of the High Country*, he defines high country as >600 m in south-eastern Australia. Jerry focuses primarily on the partly cleared gentle hill landscapes near Canberra where he has done most of his work on breeding raptors.

Jerry is passionate about raptors and this book is enriched with anecdotes from his work and travels in Canada, Mexico, Chile, Spain, etc. and his academic upbringing in USA. He poses challenging questions about why so few Australian raptors (or other birds) nest on cliffs (answer: eucalypts make great nest sites!); why raptors rarely nest above 1200 m (with information on the limits of tree growth) and debunks the myth that Wedge-tailed or Little Eagles have become dependent on rabbits for food. For the biologist, he gives useful summaries of his work on breeding raptors and their diets and ecology and breeding success. Where possible, he relates success to available data on prey abundance (e.g. the Canberra bird surveys by COG/ Phillip Veerman, and Rod Kavanagh's work on arboreal mammals as prey of Powerful Owls). Jerry gives an excellent account of Derek Ratcliff's pioneering exposure of the pesticide problem for Peregrine Falcons in UK (with worldwide implications). He gives due credit to the work of A Starker Leopold and Aldo Wolfe as pioneers of raptor ecology in the



ACT, and summaries of other relevant raptor studies. He briefly mentions Rohan Bilney's fascinating work on sub-fossil cave deposits, indicating a massive recent decline in terrestrial prey for forest owls, but then claims that diurnal raptors have had even more of a prey shift because they now take a much higher proportion of introduced species. There are chapters on anatomy, physiology, ethics and the care of injured raptors. For the general reader, there are lively accounts of Jerry's adventures in Australia and overseas, and his encounters with raptors, people, naked bathers and much more.

An interesting chapter deals with sexual dimorphism: why female raptors are often larger than males, or the other way round in our

Ninox owls (and many non-raptors). The story is complex and evolving, but Jerry makes some key points. Raptors are special because their talons and hooked bills allow only single prey items to be carried (in contrast to thrushes with multiple worms or puffins with multiple fish): this limits the use raptors can make of abundant small prey such as insects. Vertebrate animals actively hide from predators, and hunting them involves risks (e.g. collisions with trees or vehicles). Hence it is useful for the main provider (usually male) to be small and agile. *Ninox* owls are different because the smaller species often take invertebrates (albeit singly) and the larger species may store prey species in their talons until the next day.

There are some surprising omissions. Jerry emphasises the inability of falcons to build their own nest structures, but does not mention the recent molecular work, that aligns falcons taxonomically with parrots not hawks. Square-tailed Kites get no mention, despite being one

of the few raptor species that feed mainly in forests and dense woodlands (albeit mainly in the lowlands, as for other raptors), and sometimes nest >600 m in this region where forests are a key habitat. The chapter on conservation is brief and excessively focused on Canberra. It mentions umbrella species (with a single overseas reference and a naïve comment about its value), but not our successful use of the concept in Victoria to protect 350 000 ha of forest specially selected for forest owls and the ecosystems on which they depend.

Nevertheless, this book serves a useful purpose and will be enjoyed for its questioning and challenging approach, valuable information summaries, the way it links information from Australia and overseas, and Jerry's evident humour and passion for the subject.

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Camera Trapping: Wildlife Management and Research

Principal Editors: Paul Meek and Peter Flemming

Publisher: *CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, Victoria and Australian Wildlife Management Society and the Royal Zoological Society of NSW, 2014. 367 pages, paperback.*
ISBN 9781486300396. RRP \$89.95

This large volume is essentially a collection of 32 scientific papers written from presentations delivered at a camera trapping symposium that took place in Sydney in 2012. Camera trapping is a burgeoning technique replacing many other traditional wildlife survey methods, hence the need for the colloquium. This book is organised into five parts, each covering different aspects of camera trapping as a tool for the wildlife researcher.

If anyone or any organisation uses or intends to use camera traps as a survey tool, this is a useful volume as it covers all the information needed to carry out a successful camera trapping survey. That said, the book is not laid out

as a field manual, but rather as a reference into which a camera trapper may delve to ascertain hints, tricks and techniques that have been successfully, or indeed unsuccessfully, used by researchers from around Australia and beyond.

The book opens with a preface followed by an introduction from the principal editors in which the reasoning for holding the camera trapping symposium (the first of its kind) are explained. It describes how wildlife researchers and managers have been installing cameras frequently with no real forethought or strategy, in the hope of answering all their wildlife issues. Camera trapping is, of course, no panacea in understanding wildlife ecology and the editors